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ABSTRACT

This exhibit guide summarizes interpretive texts from the exhibition of Algonquin arts and craftwork assembled by the Folk Arts Program of the BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center in western New York. The Algonquin people migrate to fur farms near East Bloomfield and Holcomb, New York for fall pelting from late October through December. The image of the turtle in the exhibition represents the Algonquin creation story in which the earth is formed on the back of a great turtle. Algonquin life follows a seasonal rhythm of dispersal and aggregation, which also influences the production of Algonquin crafts. Winter is a time for knowing the ways of the ice and snow, making snowshoes and fur robes, and gathering for old feasts and new holidays. Spring is a time for tapping the maple trees for syrup, working with wood, and preparing for the spring hunt. Summer is a time for traveling by water, making canoes, setting nets, tanning hides, and displaying needlecrafts. Autumn is a time for going to the fur farms, setting traps for martens, beavers, and foxes, taking the bark from birch trees for baskets, and calling the moose. In the cycles of life each stage has its time, its tasks, and its ceremonies. Childhood is a time for learning by watching, listening, playing, practicing, and participating. Adulthood is a time for getting married and working together. The role of elders is to share wisdom and bear tradition. Changes in Algonquin life include the fur trade, fur farms, and threats to native lands. The guide provides brief biographies of seven visiting artists. (KS)

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The ALGONQUIN World

Seasons. Cycles. Change

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The ALGONQUIN World
Seasons, Cycles, Change

October 18 - November 2, 1991
Bertha V.B. Lederer Gallery
State University of New York at Geneseo

A Guide to the Exhibition

by

Sue Roark-Calnek, Ph.D., Curator

Folk Arts Program
Livingston-Steuben-Wyoming
BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center

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Algonquin families in Rapid Lake and who first opened the doors for me in Canada.

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The Band Council and community of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake at Rapid Lake, Quebec, for allowing me to live and learn among them during a sabbatical in 1989-1990 and on many previous and subsequent shorter visits. My first visits to the community were on behalf of the BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center's Folk Arts Program, and resulted in our first exhibitions of Algonquin arts, at East Bloomfield in 1987 and at the Native American Center for the Living Arts (The Turtle) in Niagara Falls, New York, in 1988.

All my teachers and friends, Algonquin people at the fur farms and at Barriere Lake. First among them are the visiting artists, who have so patiently, and for so long, shared some of their wisdom, their skills, and their lives. I have tried humbly to learn their ways of listening and looking, and they will recognize and correct my mistakes. kitci migwetc.

Sue Roark-Calnek
Exhibit Curator

INTRODUCTION

In the Algonquin world, there is a time for every purpose and a purpose for every time; all things come around as the circle turns. Season follows season; life unfolds through the cycle of birth to death.

Seasons in nature and cycles of life repeat. They provide continuity of experience within generations, between generations. In the Algonquin world, there is now also rapid and unsettling change: new challenges to old purposes, new purposes to define.

Algonquin arts and craftwork can be understood in this context of time. They are rooted in seasons, transmitted in cycles, and subject to change. This guide draws on interpretive texts from the exhibition to develop the themes of seasons, cycles and change. Most of the pieces presented in the exhibition are in the permanent collection of the BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center's Folk Arts Program; others are on loan from members of the Barriere Lake Algonquin community, Robert Lynch, and Sue Roark-Calnek.

THE ALGONQUIN WORLD

Time and Space...There are ten communities of Anicinâbek (Algonquin people) in Western Quebec and Ontario. Among them is the Barriere Lake band now settled on a small reserve at Rapid Lake, Quebec.

Many Barriere Lake Algonquins still hunt widely over their land. They have a close knowledge of the bush,

observing a relationship with it, at once spiritual and practical, which they call "respect." The artisan's craft draws on this relationship, and on the discipline it demands.

Seasonal employment in the fur industry makes use of traditional skills. Since the mid-1940s, Algonquins have come to fur farms near East Bloomfield and Holcomb, New York, for the fall pelting, from late October through December.

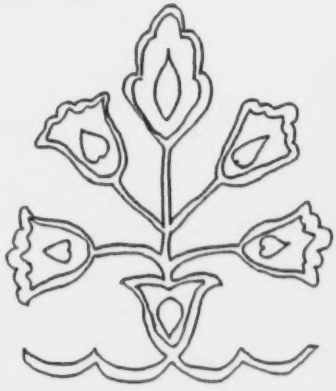
...Space and Time

The Algonquin cosmos can be represented in another way. In the traditional Algonquin creation story, the earth is formed on the back of a great turtle. North America itself has the shape of "Turtle Island," laid out in four directions that also form a circle. The plates on a turtle's shell are a calendar. The image of the turtle presented in the exhibition thus connects space and time.

SEASONS - TIMES FOR...

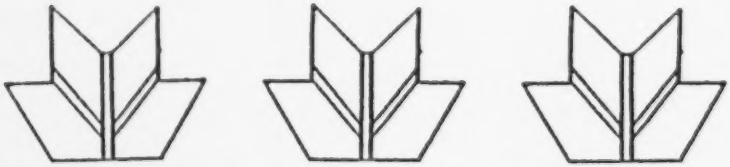
...Meeting and Parting

Algonquin life has long followed a seasonal rhythm of dispersal and aggregation. Families and their friends have traveled the land, coming together for meetings and seasonal feasts at traditional rendezvous points. Seasonal feasts renew the social community



as well as the bond between the people and their environment. They mark the times of coming and going, working and playing - the seasons of the moose, when the sap runs, when the ice forms on the shore, when the ducks return, when medicine plants can be gathered, when bark can be taken.

...**Making and Using** Seasonal rhythms also inform the production of Algonquin crafts. There are appropriate times for using an object, and times (not necessarily the same) for making it - when the bark can be scratched, when a hide can be smoked.



Winter - A Time for...

...**Knowing the Ways of the Ice and Snow** The winter has its own purposes - setting a net or line under the ice for fish, hunting moose on the mountain, cutting firewood to keep warm. For a people who travel upon waterways, winter is a time to pass on the ice, once by dogsled, now by snowmobile. The wise traveler who respects the ice knows where and when to pass safely.

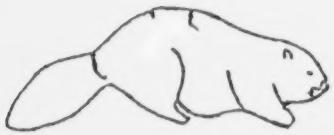
...**Walking Through the Bush like a Rabbit** Like the feet of a snowshoe hare, a snowshoe supports and spreads a traveler's weight on the snow. Yellow birch or ash frames are bent, then netted with babiche cut

from wet moosehide in very long, very thin strips and coiled. Babiche must be pulled before netting to test its strength. Three different widths are required to net a snowshoe.

Winter-phase hares are snared and their skins cut spirally into long, thin strips. Spun and twined with a wooden needle, many skins make a robe that traps warm air in the fur.

...**Dancing with the People** Winter is also a time for festive gatherings - old seasonal feasts and new holidays. At the Feast of the Three Kings (Epiphany), dancers wear bright, patterned socks decorated with yarn tassels. Socks are knitted in winter and worn pulled up over pants and boot tops for display.

Winter is also a time for storytelling and play. The nâbwân is a ring-and-pin game in which birch rings or moose knuckles are swung and impaled upon spikes.



Spring - A Time for
...**Goings and Comings** Spring comes late to the bush. New life stirs; the maple sap runs; the ducks return. As the ice retreats from the shore, waterways open. The spring feast celebrates the renewal of life and prepares for the spring hunt.

...**Sharing the Gift of the Maple** The rising of maple sap marks the coming of spring. Traditionally, maple trees were tapped with an axe; yellow birch wedges directed the sap to bark buckets. The sap is boiled down in huge pots for syrup, taffy, and sugar. The first maple tree tapped may be tied with a red cloth as a reminder that ininâtik (the maple) shares her life's blood with the people.

...**Working with Wood Like the Beaver** The sugarbush camp is a good time and place to work with wood. Snowshoe frames are bent, and wood is carved or whittled with axes and crooked knives

Jacob Wawatie has produced elegant carvings of animals in his world - moose, bears, and beavers. They fit form to function. The elongated legs of the moose serve as stanchions for display panels; the beaver gnaw their stanchions.

Summer - A Time for...

...**Knowing the Ways of the Water and Land** Summer is a time for traveling about by water, a time when the days are long and warm and the bush is a green garden of medicine plants.

...**Making Canoes and Setting Nets** Some elders

keep alive the art of the birch bark canoe, and summer is its season. Like a full sized canoe, the model canoe is made by staking, clamping, and weighting bark around a shaping frame. Cedar sheathing and ribs are set in. The canoe is sewn with spruce roots and sealed with white spruce gum. A scallop decoration may be scratched or painted under the gunwales. The rim scallop can be found also on birch bark baskets.

From a canoe, nets can be set. Traditional netmaking used a wooden shuttle and mesh gauge.

...**Tanning Hides for Moccasins and Mitts** Traditionally, tanned moosehides are soaked and scraped, stretched and beaten when wet until soft, then smoked with aged wood to beautiful browns. Commercially tanned deerhide is now also used for Algonquin leatherwork - moccasins sewn with fine puckered stitching, gauntleted mitts and fingered gloves.

...**Displaying the Craft of the Needle** Fine sewing is an enduring Algonquin craft, although tools and materials have changed. Long ago, a sewing kit might include the penis bones of martens and minks, awls, and "muscle line" or moosehair thread; today's sewing kit has steel needles, embroidery floss, and glass beads.

Traditional floral patterns are applied to leather in embroidery or beadwork. These recall the plants that nourish animal, and thus human, life. Many patterns show a symmetrical "double curve" motif.

Autumn - A Time for

...**Comings and Goings** As autumn comes to the bush, the open water of summer gives way to the ice. Geese pass overhead, going south. Animal pelts thicken; birch bark changes. People hold a fall feast and ready themselves for the time of cold. Late autumn is also when people go to the fur farms in the States.

...**Going Trapping** Setting traps for martens, beaver, or fox requires careful study of their habits. Once taken, skins are stretched for later sale or use. Indian trapping neither sentimentalizes animals nor reduces them to "things". In traditional Algonquin thinking, an animal whose ways and remains are treated with respect will offer itself to be taken. And what is offered should not be wasted.

...**Taking the Bark from the Birch for Baskets** Bark when stripped from the tree in the fall can be decorated by scratching down through the dark rind to expose a lighter layer. Design stencils cut from thin bark or brown paper are laid on the vessel and scratched around with a small knife. Floral designs are older than representational designs.

Algonquin baskets are sewn with awls and jackpine or spruce roots. Their forms depend on purpose, from simple utility containers to the elegant feast dishes. The storage basket makes a fine sewing or lunch box.

...**Calling the Moose** In the fall mating season, a skillful hunter "calls" moose through a rolled cone of birch bark. The call may be stitched with roots and may be scratch-decorated, or quickly improvised with tape.

CYCLES - TIMES FOR...

...**Making the Circles** In the circles and cycles of life, every stage has its time, its tasks, and its ceremonies. All stages should be interdependent, recognizing and respecting what each has to give.

Children - A Time for Learning...

...**By Watching and Listening** Algonquin childhood has two stages. A baby learns how to learn, developing listening and looking skills. A newborn baby may be laid in a hide and bark carrier before being tied in an upright tikinâgan or cradleboard.

The tikinâgan faces the baby out from the mother toward the world. Stood upright, it provides eye contact with what's going on. Clamshell rattles and other objects can be hung from the headbrace to amuse the child.

Carriers and cradleboards are usually decorated, with burned-wood or scratched-bark designs. In contrast, the memebizin or baby swing is simple and wholly functional in construction, quickly fashioned from things at hand and suitable for hanging anywhere, indoors or out.

Children - A Time for Learning...

...By Play, Practice, Participation Girls and boys move toward marriage by mastering the skills required for a couple's survival. Play still teaches lessons about life. Ring-and-pin games develop hand-eye coordination and counting skills. Cats-cradle trains the fingers and eye in complex visual patterns. By practicing marksmanship on a partridge, a child prepares to hunt. Participation in feasts teaches spiritual and social values.

Men & Women - a Time For...

...Coming Together Traditional Algonquin marriages were arranged by families when a couple could have children, feed and clothe them. Contemporary weddings integrate Algonquin customs with Catholic

ritual. The community feasts with the families. In one recent wedding, a bark canoe fetched the bride; a gift canoe held other gifts.

...**Working Together** The strength of a marriage has been in working together. Men's and women's roles should be complementary, each providing support for the other. Gender roles are not rigid. Women hunt and trap when they must, when they wish. Men can cook, and some knit socks. Anyone should be able to make an axe handle, the tool with which one can make everything needed to survive in the bush.

Grandmothers and Grandfathers - A Time for...

...**Sharing Wisdom** . Elders have passed through the seasons and cycles of life. Older women wear the traditional cloth dress, decorated with ribbon trim. Elders teach, by example and advice; in turn, they should receive help and respect from younger people.

...**Bearing Tradition** Oral traditions transmitted by elders explain the origins of the Algonquin world and contain lessons for everyday life. One such tradition is "The Pike and the Sturgeon", told with the bones in the head of a pikefish.

CHANGE - TIMES FOR...

...**Old Roads, New Turnings** Change has come to the Algonquin world, to the people and the land itself. There are new shorelines, new roads, new points of

connection with the outside. The recent history of the Algonquin people is punctuated by events and places - the fur trade, the fur farm, the reserve, the protest. It is also mirrored in their arts.

....**New Branches, Old Roots.** Today's Algonquin artists produce work for sale as well as for use. They are nourished by the land and tradition. They also explore new materials, techniques, styles. Contemporary beadwork is applied to keychains, watchbands, and jewelry. Beaders also work materials from the bush - porcupine quills, beaver teeth, bear claws - into their ornaments. A stretched hide or a T-shirt can serve as a canvas.

...**The Fur Trade** At trading posts, Algonquins supplied the traders with furs, snowshoes, canoes, and the skills needed to survive in the bush. From the traders, Algonquins received steel traps and guns, knife and axe blades, fiddles, wool socks, and step dancing, flour and spirits, yard goods and beads, plaids for cradleboard covers. Texts from Hudson's Bay Company records show us Algonquin people as traders saw them.

...**The Fur Farms** Algonquins migrate seasonally from Canada to fur farms near East Bloomfield and Holcomb, New York. Fur farm work - killing, skinning, and skiving (defleshing) - is an alternative to fall trapping. It repeats the traditional pattern of seasonal dispersal, and draws on skills which served Algonquins well during the fur trade. The organization of the workplace is very different from the bush or the trading post. Someone else is the boss. From the migrant experience, Algonquins have acquired new technologies, styles, and tastes.

The 1976 reminiscences of Allan Saxby recall early Algonquin migrancy from an East Bloomfield mink farmer's point of view.

...**The Reserve** A map showing past and present locations of Barriere Lake Algonquin people accompanies an account of their settlement at Rapid Lake. The present 59-acre reserve provides housing and community services for 450 people. Community members also maintain campsites or cabins in the surrounding bush, their traditional land use area. Much of this area is now contained within La Verendrye Park, a Provincial Wildlife Reserve.

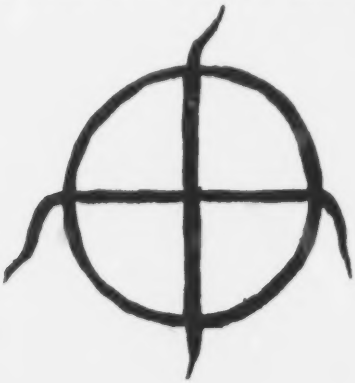
...**The Protest** This land use area has been threatened by competing demands for its resources by non-Native interests. La Verendrye has been opened to sport hunting in moose and bear seasons. Loggers have clear-cut much of the forest. In 1989 and 1990, the community mobilized to defend its traditional land, with a blockade of logging roads and the highway. A recent agreement promises to recognize Al-

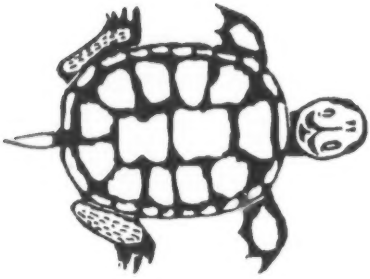
gonquin interests in developing a joint land use strategy. Meanwhile, people watch and wait.

WINDOWS ON THE ALGONQUIN WORLD...

...Anicinâbe means "Algonquin" Photography and videography are windows on other worlds, elsewhere and elsewhen. The camera and camcorder can document continuities from the past to preserve them for the future. These wonderful devices, "the sun captured in a box", also open windows on another world for the Native peoples of the Canadian North. We look in on their world; through the medium of television they look in on ours. The show closes with a video display of contemporary Barriere Lake life.

...Anicinâbe Also Means "Human" Season follows season; the cycles of life repeat. History moves on The choices that Barriere Lake people make about roads for their future will affect our lives, as our choices affect theirs. With understanding, perhaps, we can both choose to walk separately, together. The Algonquin world is a window on **our** world.





Visiting Artists

Helene (Lena) Jerome Nottaway was born about 1914 in the bush near Rapid Lake, Quebec. She was employed for many years as a seasonal migrant farmworker at Saxby Fur Farm, East Bloomfield, New York. She is a traditional elder and midwife in the Barriere Lake Algonquin community, and, with her daughter Irene Jerome, is widely regarded among Algonquin people as a notable producer and teacher of traditional crafts. She has been a mentor in traditional culture for the Migizi Cultural School at Rapid Lake, and has shared her craft as a bark basket maker with young students at the Rapid Lake School. Pieces by her are in the Collections of the Canadian Ethnology Service, Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Irene Jerome was born in 1937 in the bush near Rapid Lake. She has also been a seasonally migrant farmworker at Saxby Fur Farm. She has been an instructor in traditional crafts for the former Kitiganik Pakiganekisan Crafts Association at Rapid Lake. With her mother, she has taught bark basket making to children at the Rapid Lake School and has mentored students from the Migizi Cultural School in traditional culture. She has recently worked with

Vermont Abenakis in a revival of birch bark basket-making. Her work is also represented in the Collections of the Canadian Ethnology Service, Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Jacob Wawatie was born in 1956 at Rapid Lake. He too has worked seasonally at Saxby Fur Farm. He has taught and developed curriculum in Algonquin traditional culture and language for the Rapid Lake School, has been a mentor in traditional culture for the Mizigi Cultural School at Rapid Lake, and is an instructor in Algonquin language studies for Native teachers, McGill University's Native Teacher Certification Program.

Jaimie Wawatie was born in 1981 at Maniwaki. She is the daughter of Jacob and Laurie Jacobs Wawatie, and is a student at the Rapid Lake School.

Lena Nottaway, Irene Jerome, and Jacob Wawatie have demonstrated traditional crafts at the annual First Nations Education Conferences at Trois-Rivières, Quebec, and at the Native American Center for the Living Arts (The Turtle) Niagara Falls, New York in 1988. Irene Jerome and Lena Nottaway were Consultants for the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Canadian Ethnology Service) Algonquin Artifacts Documentation Project, January 1991. Jacob Wawatie and Irene Jerome have also reviewed the Algonquin collections at the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, in 1989 with the staff of the Museum's Research Branch.

Josephine Poucachiche Vazquez was born at Rapid Lake in 1949. She came to Western New York as a seasonal farmworker and "settled out" on an area fur farm after her marriage to William Vazquez, a Puerto Rican farmworker.

Michael Greenlar is a professional photographer based in Syracuse, NY. He has an A.A. in audiovisual technology from Monroe Community College and a B.A. in journalism from St. John Fisher College, and was formerly a staff photographer with Syracuse newspapers. In addition to his work with Algonquin people, Mr. Greenlar has done photojournalism and documentation projects on migrant farmworkers in Central and Western New York, apartheid in South Africa, and charcoal burners in Haiti. His photographs have appeared in Life, Time, Newsweek, and the New York Times Sunday Magazine.